

Indian People's Action



Good afternoon, Chair and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Michaelynn Hawk, current Project Director for Indian People's Action and I live in Butte, Montana. I am an enrolled member of the Crow Tribe.

I'm here today on behalf of Indian People's Action. Indian People's Action is a statewide community organization working on social, economic and racial justice issues. We are a diverse organization of low to moderate income Native Montanans. We empower members to achieve lasting change for social, economic, and racial justice using direct action.

I am here in support of HB590 for several reasons;

Despite treaty and legal rights entitling Native Americans to health care, we still suffer from a broken health care system which results in grave health disparities for our communities. By expanding Medicaid in Montana we would be investing both in a stronger Indian Health Services system, as well as the overall health of tribal members across the state of Montana

More Eligible for Coverage means that many of the nearly 40% of Native Americans in Montana currently without health insurance, would then be eligible to receive health coverage under Medicaid. This would allow more people to receive the health care they were guaranteed, and so critically need.

Improved Access to health care providers for Native Americans living off of reservations or long distances from remote Indian Health Services (I.H.S.) facilities. Distance, limited transportation, and inclement Montana weather often makes it difficult to access necessary medical attention. By expanding Medicaid, more Natives would have the option to use a local medical facility that is convenient to them; allowing for the improved health of Montana's tribal members.

Invest in Indian Health Services by providing the opportunity for I.H. S. and tribal government hospitals to focus on preventative and family medicine, allowing them to receive Medicaid reimbursements for care that they may otherwise have to provide at no cost. Medicaid expansion would allow facilities to see more patients with the new revenue, reducing patient wait times and turn-away.

Contract Services is a way for Native Americans without health insurance, to receive care by a medical specialist (i.e. Cardiologist, Hematologist, Oncologist, Emergency Services) that may not be available at their local I.H.S. clinic or hospital. Often, there are not enough Contract Services dollars to stretch the entire calendar year; leaving patients with only one option- to wait to receive the care they need. By expanding Medicaid, making more patients eligible, more tribal members would be able to see specialists using their Medicaid insurance and would no longer have to wait to receive the medical attention they need.

Medicaid Expansion is paid for even *past* 2016, when services are provided at an I.H.S. or tribal government facility. The federal government will pay 100% of the cost for Native Americans who receive care in these facilities, allowing States to save the modest amount they will be asked to contribute for their other newly eligible state residents.

Caring for Our Elderly. We know that many of the recipients of Medicaid are elderly. We want to ensure that our elders are taken care of in a good way, and have the medical coverage that many of them are unable to afford. Expanding Medicaid would allow for more of our Elders to be covered.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this very important matter.

Michaelynn Hawk